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Golden Bovell!

by Kwame Laurence

George Bovell was absolutely brilliant at the Juan Pablo Duarte Aquatic Centre, here in the Dominican Republic last night, writing his name into the Trinidad and Tobago record books with the country's very first golden performance at the 14th Pan American Games.

The 20-year-old swimmer whipped the men's 200 metres freestyle field to become the country's most successful swimmer in Pan Am Games history. Bovell, who produced a national record clocking of one minute, 48.90 seconds, is only the second swimmer from T&T to earn a Pan Am medal. At the 1987 Games, in Indianapolis, Mark Andrews bagged men's 100m freestyle bronze.

Bovell seized early control of last night's race, and by the halfway stage, he had a comfortable cushion on his closest rival, John Daniel Ketchum of the United States. The American snapped up silver, in 1:49.34, while Brazilian Rodrigo Castro (1:49.55) claimed bronze.

T&T have so far captured three medals here in Santo Domingo. Candice Scott bagged women's hammer throw bronze, while Nic Connor Alexander, Marc Burns, Ato Boldon and Darrel Brown combined for bronze in the men's 4x100m relay.

Golden Bovell is set to write another chapter of history, on Saturday, when he competes in the 200m individual medley. He is the favourite, following his impressive fifth place finish at the 2003 World Championships in Barcelona, Spain.

In his morning swim, yesterday, Bovell clocked one minute, 51.00 seconds in heat four to advance to the final as the second fastest qualifier. The Auburn University student was very satisfied with his effort.

"It was a comfortable swim. I think I have a chance to get a gold medal."

He was right! The T&T swimmer crushed his rivals to capture the country's seventh gold medal in the 52-year history of the Pan Am Games.

Bovell's younger brother, Nicholas, clocked 1:54.25 to finish third in the men's 200m freestyle "B" final, and 11th overall. He had qualified 16th fastest, in 1:55.65.

Sharntelle McLean returned a time of 59.55 seconds in the women's 100m freestyle "B" final. The clocking was good enough for sixth spot, earning her a final placing of 14th. McLean had qualified 13th, in 59.52. Linda McEachrane, however, touched in 1:00.21 in the heats, and did not advance.

National team coach Anil Roberts explained that McEachrane is a better swimmer than her 19th place ranking in the event suggests.

"Linda had a bit of a slow swim, but she has been in exams and had an ear infection. Overall, though, it was a solid day."

In the women's 400m individual medley "B" final, Ayeisha Collymore was seventh in five minutes, 26.10 seconds, faster than her 5:26.43 morning swim. The T&T swimmer, the 14th fastest qualifier in the heats, finished 15th overall.

Shannon Duval is expected to be in the pool, today, competing in the women's 200m breaststroke. She will swim in the second of three heats.

Collymore and both Bovells will be in action tomorrow (Wednesday), in individual events. Collymore has been drawn in heat one of the women's 100m backstroke. Nicholas is in the third men's 200m backstroke heat. And George will swim in the last of six heats in the men's 100m freestyle.

"I don't know what it will take to get a medal," the elder Bovell told the Express, "but to go under 50 seconds would be an accomplishment for me.

"I've done some fast times already, this summer," he continued, "so the pressure is off."

Roberts said the 100m freestyle will be a very tough event.

"George hasn't swum a 100 free in a long time, but his speed has been coming down and, as you can see, his fitness is there. So, he'll be taking a shot at them. It will be an exciting race."

A T&T team is likely to compete in tomorrow's women's 4x100m freestyle relay.

Kertson Manswell will be at the Carlos Teo Cruz Coliseum today, trading punches with the host nation's Francisco Garcia Nunez in a heavyweight division quarter-final. If he gets the better of his opponent, the Commonwealth Games silver medallist will become only the third boxer from T&T to mount a Pan Am Games rostrum.

Also today, the hockey teams play for fifth spot in their respective competitions.

Skipper Kwand-wayne Browne will bid to lead the T&T men by example, against the United States. The England-based player is currently the tournament's leading scorer, with 15 goals, two more than Argentina's Jorge Lombi.

The T&T women would be hoping that forward Oire Trotman can add to her five goals, in the showdown with Canada. Nicole Dixon and Stacey Siu Butt have also been in form, here in Santo Domingo, scoring three goals each.